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AUTHOR Hermann, Burton R.
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ABSTRACT

To determine the perceived effectiveness of faculty representation on the governing boards of 53 fairly representative colleges and universities in the United States, a questionnaire was sent to college presidents, lay trustees, faculty representatives, faculty members and student representatives. Responses from 326 respondents indicated 81% judged their system of faculty representation to be effective, 89% wanted it to continue and only 45% preferred their system of faculty representation to a system of collective bargaining. Twenty-seven percent did not prefer faculty representation while the remaining 27 percent were undecided. Of the five groups of respondents only the presidents and the lay trustees revealed a clear majority favoring faculty representation over collective bargaining. Only 37% of the total respondents viewed faculty representation as being more effective than collective bargaining. Although 51% did not want collective bargaining in addition to faculty trusteeship, 31% wanted both systems while 19% were undecided. Conclusions indicate that although faculty trusteeship may still be desirable because of its effectiveness in making improvements in certain areas such as communication and board competence, it cannot be an effective alternative to collective bargaining in achieving satisfactory faculty salaries and in protecting the academic freedom and tenure rights of the faculty. (Author/MJM)

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Faculty Trusteeship and Collective Bargaining[1]

Can Faculty Representation on Governing Boards be an Effective Alternative to Collective Bargaining?

Burton R. Hermann

Within the last few years, there has been a noticeable trend among college and university faculties toward collective bargaining and representation on governing boards. As a result, about 10 percent of the institutions of higher learning have faculty bargaining agents while approximately 15 percent have faculty trustees, with apparently very few having both types of faculty representatives. Indeed, some observers of the college scene believe that faculty trusteeship is preferable to collective bargaining and hence imply that those faculties that have representation on their governing boards will not need or desire unionization.

Notably, Daniel H. Perlman of Roosevelt University and T. R. McConnell of the Center for Research and Development in Higher Education, Berkeley, contend that faculty representation on governing boards can be an effective alternative to collective bargaining. On the other side, Myron Lieberman, well-known advocate of faculty unions, argues that any faculty representational system that depends upon the employer for support will never be effective in protecting the faculty interest when the chips are down (as they almost universally are now). Until the faculty representatives control a majority of the regular board seats, they will need the support of other trustees to secure favorable action on their proposals. Since it appears highly improbable that very many faculties, if any, will get control of their governing boards, Lieberman's thesis, if correct, relegates faculty trusteeship to a relatively ineffective status now and in the future. Indeed, there

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is reason to believe that a strong president can control faculty representatives on the board easier than he can control lay trustees. He cannot fire the lay members of the board.

August W. Eberle, Chairman of the Department of Higher Education at Indiana University and a student of governing boards, recently stated that he feared that faculty representation on boards will not achieve a satisfactory role for faculties in time to head off unionization and collective bargaining. Indeed, the president of a major university in the Southwest even more recently commented that he doubted "that having faculty representation on governing boards would have anything whatever to do with the possibility of the organization of labor unions among college faculties."

To determine the perceived effectiveness of faculty representation on the governing boards of 53 fairly representative colleges and universities in the United States, the writer recently completed a questionnaire survey as a major part of his dissertation research. Some of the questions also dealt with collective bargaining. Included among the 326 respondents were 21 presidents, 75 lay trustees, 62 faculty representatives, 139 faculty members, and 25 student representatives.

Whereas 81 percent of the respondents judged their system of faculty representation to be effective /and 89 percent wanted it to continue, only 45 percent preferred their system of faculty representation to a system of collective bargaining. Twenty-seven percent did not prefer faculty representation while the remaining 27 percent were undecided. Of the five groups of respondents mentioned above, only the presidents and the lay trustees revealed a clear majority favoring faculty representa/tion over collective bargaining. Thus, these results indicate

that many, if not most, of the faculty members participating in the survey view faculty representation as being less effective than collective bargaining in promoting faculty interests. In fact, only 37 percent of the total respondents viewed faculty representation as being more effective than collective bargaining. And although 51 percent did not want collective bargaining in addition to faculty trusteeship, 31 percent wanted both systems while 19 percent were undecided.

The typical system of faculty representation has been established only since 1968 and involves two nonvoting faculty trustees (in relation to 24 voting lay trustees) elected by the faculty. Although many respondents attributed the weaknesses of faculty representation to an insufficient number of faculty representatives, the respondents as a whole recommended that the proportion of regular board seats held by the faculty should be increased to only 16 percent (from the existing allocation of approximately 4 percent). (If all of the 106 faculty representatives now serving on the 53 governing boards were given the vote, they would hold 7.1 percent of the total board seats.) Surprisingly, the faculty members recommended that faculty representation be increased to only 20 percent. However, not surprisingly, the presidents wanted to allocate only 10 percent of the regular board seats to the faculty.

These survey results indicate that apparently many faculty members who hold a negative view of the effectiveness of faculty representation doubt that even a great increase in the number of faculty representatives would result in a significantly greater effectiveness. These faculty members evidently believe that the real power is held by the president, not the board of trustees./ (Forty percent of all respondents agreed that this was the case.) On the other end of the spectrum, the presidents indicated that they believe the faculties already have enough power through representation on their boards and thus should not be granted a great increase in board

seats. In passing, it must be noted that the systems with greater faculty representation were not rated significantly more effective than the systems with lesser faculty trusteeship.

Faculty representation was rated as being more effective where the presentation of faculty views to the board is through the president, where there is an established method of faculty representative-faculty communication before board meetings, and where the presidents and/or lay trustees have a more favorable attitude toward faculty trusteeship. Faculty representation was rated most effective in improving faculty-board communication and in providing valuable professional competence to the board. On the other hand, faculty representation was judged most ineffective in securing higher faculty salaries. Finally, it was rated only moderately successful in safeguarding academic freedom.

These results not only reveal the dependence of the faculty representatives on the lay trustees for support but also the importance of securing a favorable attitude from the president. Operating with these constraints, it is not surprising that faculty representatives have been least effective in securing higher faculty salaries. Indeed, the survey produced some evidence that indicated the faculty representatives do not even attempt to get salary increases for the faculty. If this is the prevailing situation, then the contrast between faculty trusteeship and collective bargaining is striking indeed. Whereas one system is best known for its effectiveness in securing pay raises, the other one perhaps does not even deal with the issue, probably out of fear of raising a conflict of interest charge.

In answering the question raised by the writer, the discussion in the preceding paragraph is most important because financial security is becoming an increasingly critical issue with faculties. With the Ph.D. surplus creating a buyers' market for college teachers, there is declining market pressure on boards to raise faculty salaries and, in some cases, to uphold academic freedom and tenure. This element plus the public's decreasing enthusiasm for funding higher education have produced a poor economic outlook for college and university faculty members. So long as the increase in real income of college faculty lags behind that of the rest of society and academic freedom and tenure are being threatened, collective bargaining will be an increasingly alluring system of faculty representation. Although faculty trusteeship may still be desirable because of its effectiveness in making improvements in certain areas such as communication and board competence, it cannot be an effective alternative to collective bargaining in achieving satisfactory faculty salaries and in protecting the academic freedom and tenure rights of the faculty.